

German interior minister agitates against immigrants

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At a meeting of EU interior ministers in Brussels last week, German Interior Minister Hans-Peter Friedrich (Christian Social Union, CSU) reiterated that he would prevent the inclusion of Romania and Bulgaria in the Schengen agreement, which lifts routine border controls between most EU countries. He indicated that he would use Germany's veto if necessary.

Representatives of the French and Dutch governments had also expressed their disapproval beforehand. A decision on whether border controls for those coming from the two countries would be lifted was therefore postponed again.

In Brussels, Friedrich also spoke out against free movement in Europe. "Does free movement in Europe mean that we can expect one day that people anywhere in Europe, who believe that they can live on welfare in Germany better than in their own countries, will come to Germany?" asked Frederick. "This danger must not be realized".

Earlier in the week, the interior minister had spoken out against immigrants from Eastern Europe. He deliberately stoked up resentment against supposed "benefit tourism" from other EU member states.

Friedrich received backing from the chair of the home affairs committee of the Bundestag (federal parliament), Wolfgang Bosbach (Christian Democratic Union, CDU). Speaking to *Die Welt*, Bosbach warned of a surge of "economic refugees" and declared: "We have seen the consequences of the abolition of visa requirements for Serbs and Macedonians, and we fear similar consequences if border controls with Bulgaria and Romania are abolished".

This witch-hunting of immigrants goes hand in hand with the increasingly brutal actions of the state. In January, when the German Association of Cities called on the federal government to exempt municipalities

from increasing the costs of emergency medical care and social services for Roma, the interior ministry said that it saw no reason to do so. A spokesperson for the ministry urged local authorities instead to deal with the problems arising from immigration by "police and regulatory measures".

Almost 70 years after the murder of 500,000 Sinti and Roma by the Nazi regime, immigrants from Southeast Europe are being defamed, attacked and expelled from Germany. The cynical campaign against immigrants from Southeastern European countries and the increasingly brutal crackdown against them are not limited to Germany.

Xenophobic and racist tones are becoming louder in the UK too, given the imminent lifting of EU restrictions on the free movement of workers from Bulgaria and Romania. Work and Pensions Minister Iain Duncan Smith (Conservative Party) is singing the same tune as Friedrich in Germany and denounced Europeans that "only travel around and look for the best benefits they can get." Health Minister Mark Harper (Conservative Party) announced that free access to the National Health Service (NHS) would be limited to British citizens. "The National Health Service is a national service and not an international one", he said.

In France, all the establishment parties are adopting the positions of the National Front, which is whipping up sentiments against immigrants from Bulgaria and Romania. They are receiving support from the trade union bureaucracy, which is questioning the free movement of workers throughout the EU. French President François Hollande and his interior minister Manuel Valls (both of the Socialist Party, SP) have continued the ruthless policies of conservative President Nicolas Sarkozy, clearing out Roma camps and deporting these immigrants to Romania or

Bulgaria.

Some 20 years after the collapse of the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe, and almost 10 years after the last round of EU enlargement into Eastern Europe, rigid entry requirements and mass travel bans are back on the agenda in Europe.

The dirty campaign against the poorest of the poor is an attack on the entire European working class. It is an attempt to place a racist interpretation on social impoverishment and make the victims of the social cuts responsible for them. In this way, the resistance of workers is to be divided and the powers of the state increased.

In reality, there is no immigration problem, but a problem of social polarization in every European country. Since the collapse of Stalinism, Romania and Bulgaria have been systematically looted and the social rights of workers crushed. Ever since 2000, the EU has played a leading role in this.

With a debt ratio of 16.3 percent of GDP, Bulgaria is a model state for the EU. At the behest of the EU, tax cuts for the rich, deregulation of markets and the destruction of the welfare system have transformed the country into a paradise for investors.

The population has been bled dry and lives in abject poverty. The average wage in Bulgaria is just one-tenth that in Germany. Youth unemployment stands at nearly 30 percent, according to the charity Caritas, and 40 percent of children do not have enough food to eat.

The Roma are affected more harshly by this development than most. After the restoration of capitalism, the earlier trend towards the integration of the Roma was abruptly reversed. Roma were the first to be affected by mass layoffs and reduced wages, pensions and social benefits.

Speaking on *Deutschlandradio*, a Macedonian immigrant summed up the reasons for the growing wave of emigration, “If you ask me why everyone wants to leave here in order to apply for asylum, the answer is: there is no work here”, he said. “My father had the good fortune to have a job with the state; he was able to provide us children with a future. I cannot give my children anything nice. Here, you get €30 a month [US\$40] social assistance. That’s not enough for meals, let alone for medicines or school books”.

The humanitarian crisis in Southeast Europe, which is driving people to migrate, is only the most intense

expression of a pan-European development. What began in Eastern Europe 20 years ago is now being continued in southern Europe and will be extended to the whole continent. The starvation wages paid in the east are already being used as a lever to lower salaries throughout the EU.

In Western European countries, immigrants are often the first to be hit by the social polarization of the entire society. In Germany, immigrants from Southeast Europe are given neither accommodation, nor health insurance or social assistance. They are not even able to access the integration courses funded by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees.

Bulgarians and Romanians will be able to work in the EU without restrictions from 2014; until then they are only able to work in a self-employed capacity or as seasonal workers, for example helping with the asparagus harvest. Until then, they have no choice but to try their luck as casual day labourers. For two euros an hour, they load shipping containers, work in construction or help with home renovations.

Many have no accommodation or are forced to languish in inhumane and run-down houses. These are either illegally occupied “squats”, from which they can be thrown out at any time, or they have to pay landlords for a place to sleep, often only in a dormitory in a crowded apartment at €30 a night.

The interior ministry wants to curb the effects of these barbaric social conditions by increasing the state’s powers at home and by erecting new border controls. This is paving the way for further social attacks on the entire population.



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